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SUBJECT: POLICE FILE CHARGES AGAINST TER-PETROSSIAN SUPPORTERS

REF: Yerevan 1279

11. (U) On October 30, Armenian police filed criminal charges against five supporters of former president Levon Ter-Petrossian (LTP) who were detained October 23 (reftel). The charges include "hooliganism committed by a group," and "violence against a representative of the authorities." If proven, the charges carry a maximum term of five years' imprisonment. The editors of two fiercely pro-opposition newspapers, Nikol Pashinyan from the "Haykakan Zhamanak" daily, and Shoger Matevosyan from the "Fourth Estate" semi-weekly, were among those charged. The remaining three are Petros Makeyan, leader of the small opposition party Democratic Motherland, and his two sons, Tigran and Karen Makeyan. Meanwhile, on October 25 Gohar Veziryan, a female journalist from the "Fourth Estate," was hospitalized with a concussion ascribed to the October 23 incident.

12. (SBU) COMMENT: The police's heavy-handed tactics needlessly cast an unflattering light on authorities as they prepare to contest the February presidential election. The filing of these criminal charges reinforces the widespread impression that authorities are prepared to do whatever it takes to hold onto power.

PENNINGTON